

FUNNY WORLD #2

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Prepared for the November 1966 mailing of CAPA-alpha by Mike Barrier, 5813 Hawthorne Road, Little Rock, Arkansas 72207.

WE are the masters of Quackly Hall!

The lords and the nobles and KINGS of it all!

We'll rule here unbothered for millions of years--

Us roughneck and rowdy three musketeers!

---Huey, Dewey and Louie Duck, 1953

(Yeah, it doesn't quite scan, but I say anyway: who needs the Song of the Blackhawks?)

Whether I can stick to a monthly schedule for FUNNY WORLD is questionable indeed; it's worth the try, though. Mailing comments in particular grow stale after a couple of issues, and there's always the temptation to take up in letters what should be dealt with in mailing comments, if contributions--and so mailing comments--appear only infrequently. There's a contradiction of sorts in urging more frequent contributions while at the same time decrying sloppy, rushed contributions and urging more meaty articles. It's at least possible, though, to prepare plenty of brief, informal contributions while at the same time tackling larger projects that may take months to work up into publishable shape. That's what I'm going to try to do, anyway.

I was a little startled by this remark by the Central Mailers: "We got several protests for listing all ratings in #23; we think protestors have a point." I wouldn't have thought K-alphas were so thin-skinned. The only "point" I can see is that the rankings might not be an accurate reflection of our opinions, because we rate only the top three contributions on our post-card ballots--this for reasons I discussed in FUNNY WORLD #1. But assuming the ratings do accurately reflect our feelings, what's so terrible about having your contribution ranked last? Unless, that is, you're too proud or lazy to make the effort to improve your 'zine, and if that's the case you may be in the wrong club. As a famous editorial-cartoon character once said, if you can't stand the heat, get out of the APA (or something to that effect).

Dick Pryor: Before we join you in that ever-popular sport, accusing Howard Rogofsky of skulduggery, tell us this: do you subscribe to THE ROCKET'S BLAST and THE FANTASY COLLECTOR by third-class, first-class or air mail? As I've discovered, the only way to have a good chance at reasonably-priced old comics is to subscribe to FC by air mail and RBCC by first-class. Third-class copies of RBCC, in particular, are mailed out in a trickle that may cover several weeks, presumably to spread out postage costs.

In case you missed the reviews, Dr. Fredric Wertham has written yet another book, A SIGN FOR CAIN (Macmillan, \$6.95), in which he again attacks comic books. Superman, for example, is "the embodiment of racial superiority, race pride, race prejudice," since "no dark-skinned or dark-complexioned or not-so-tall-or-so-full-chested youngster, whoever he is or whatever he achieves, can measure up to the white Superman." And so forth. The focus of the book evidently is physical violence, and how crimes of violence are bred by the American preoccupation with violence that is expressed in our popular culture. Dr. Wertham, and other people (such as Gershon Legman) who have dealt with the problem, have a point, certainly, but Wertham is mistaken if he assumes that all the violence in the popular media is of a piece, and all equally dangerous. And as SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT so vividly demonstrated, he doesn't understand that violent, irrational arguments are just as dangerous in their way as the physical violence against which they are directed. Purity of motive is, alas, no substitute for clarity of thought.

For an example of violence that is almost "healthy," you need turn no further than to the January issue of TARZAN. I've read only a few of the Burroughs books, and unfortunately, reading them left me with no urge to read others, so I can't pass on the merits of "Tarzan the Untamed" as an adaptation. As a comic-book story, though, it's superior to the first five adaptations, reading much more smoothly than the complicated and text-heavy strips that preceded. It's an extraordinarily violent story, of course, with the hero machine-gunning dozens of men and hurling another to his death from an airplane. But this, surely, is the sort of violence that could damage only a child who was already severely disturbed. The violence in "Tarzan the Untamed" is "normal" violence, arising naturally out of the surrounding circumstances. The violence is resolved just as naturally, without undue emphasis or--equally important--artificial restraint. Tarzan's jungle, too, is alien to the lives of the comic book's readers, both in time and place. What happens there has little to do with the way life is lived in Little Rock or Cleveland or Los Angeles in 1966. Violence may exist in these places, too, but it's of a different order than the violence that flourishes in Tarzan's World War I-era Africa.

The "normal" violence that fills TARZAN is characteristic of many of the Dell/Gold Key adventure titles, and this goes a long way toward explaining why I've always enjoyed them more than the adventure and super-hero comics published by other companies. This was brought home to me not long ago when I bought a batch of Dell westerns from the early and mid-Fifties, many of which I fondly remembered reading at the tail end of my own "comic-book-reading stage." Seven of the nine SILVERTIP one-shots were in the lot, and the early issues in particular (illustrated by Sam Glanzman, I think) are full of blood and agony. Silvertip is dragged behind a horse in the

first one-shot (#491) and ends up not only ragged and bruised, but with a bright patch of red oozing from one corner of his mouth. Here, as elsewhere, violence is real--it hurts. But it's never dwelt upon with morbid fascination, and Silvertip's dusty, sweaty, raw and lawless Southwest is far removed from our own experience. Handled this way, and in this sort of setting, violence becomes simply another element in a piece of escapist literature.

It's when violence in comic-book stories is unnaturally emphasized that it becomes a danger, and ironically, the Comics Code emphasizes violence in the very act of "suppressing" it. What the Code gives us--or tries to give us--is violence without pain, so that we can be entertained by violence without the discomfort of observing its consequences. The DC comics are special offenders, because of their "realistic" trappings--the pseudoscience, the non-super villains, and the like. The antiseptic, painless violence in which the Flash and Batman indulge is all of a piece with this silly picture of the world. The Marvel comics are considerably superior in this regard, not because their heroes ever look like they've been belted around the block, but because they talk about how much they hurt, to themselves and to other people. Spider-man will always tell us when he's been clobbered and feels like hell, even if he only looks a little hung-over. Batman's stereotyped expressions of pain--infrequent as they are--are never quite as believable. The Marvel characters have something more going for them, since they exist in a real world--not Our World, but real world nevertheless, full of furniture and super-villains and neuroses. The violence that exists in this Marvel world, with super-heroes and super-villains beating up on one another, obviously doesn't have a lot to do with what goes on in our own world, but it's plausible enough on its own terms. The DC heroes, by contrast, both live and fight in a void that bears a superficial--and perhaps deceptive--resemblance to our own surroundings.

It's crazy, really, that the Comics Code Authority (or anyone else) should think that violence is dandy so long as its consequences are ignored. Now, if Dr. Wertham would say that loud and clear, he'd be worth listening to.

I find this is one of those nights when, for whatever reason, I'm leaving out lots of little words as I copy my notes onto these stencils. "It" after "preceded" in the second paragraph of the tirade above, for example, and "the" and "a" and similarly inconspicuous words in other places. So please put your imaginations to work and pretend those little words are there...even if your friends do say you're crazy for seeing invisible words. As a comics fan, you should be used to being considered crazy, after all.

John Ryan: The first BOOMERANG was enormously enjoyable--and received my vote for best in the issue--but the obvious and interesting question now is, what happens to "Alias, The Owl" now that Gold Key is reviving the character who was once featured in CRACKAJACK FUNNIES? I've never seen the old Owl, so I have no idea whether he resembles the new Owl, but it looks as if there could be some copyright problems.

I was glancing over some of the little Walt Disney comic books distributed by Wheaties as premiums in 1951, and came across one that has a certain ironic interest for collectors today. It's called "Donald Duck, Mighty Mystic," and the plot is that Donald is hit on the head by a baseball and suddenly acquires the power to predict anything--the weather, stock market fluctuations, the works. (Funny animals are always acquiring strange powers when they're hit on the head; us ordinary mortals have to make do with headaches, unfortunately.) Donald sets himself up as a mystic-for-a-fee, and Uncle Scrooge is one of his clients. Donald advises him over the phone to buy up all the comic books in town. "But what would I do with them?" Scrooge asks. "I'll tell you how to make a fortune with them," Donald replies, "after you pay me my one dollar fee." Scrooge proceeds to buy up not only every comic book in Duckburg, but every comic book in the world--49 jillion or trillion of them (the figure varies). But before Scrooge can pay Donald and learn how to make a fortune with all these comic books, Donald suffers another blow on the head and loses his powers. Things look black until Donald's nephews suggest to Scrooge that he open a Comic Book Library where a kid can read all day for a penny. The next-to-last panel shows the enormous piles of comics that make up the library, looking rather like those newspaper photographs of Billy Placzek's collection.

We know, of course, what Donald would have suggested that Scrooge do: hold the comics for 15 years and then offer them at outrageous prices through an ad in THE ROCKET'S BLAST.

WISHFUL THINKING DEPARTMENT: In connection with the debut of the Marvel TV cartoons, Marvel has been distributing a copy of the ESQUIRE article about their super-heroes to radio and TV editors around the country, with a press release that bears this heading: "ESQUIRE MAGAZINE SAYS MARVEL COMICS EQUAL DOSTOEVSKI."

This summer, as in the past, comic books have been used in the Arkansas election campaigns. One candidate for the Democratic nomination issued a comic book earlier this year, and the Republican candidate for lieutenant governor is distributing one now (although he presumably will have stopped passing them out by the time you read this, since the election will be over). Dale Alford, the candidate for governor, used essentially the same comic book four years ago, when he first ran for governor--except that this time, he deleted several pages describing his role as a stalwart champion of segregation and states rights and that crud. Like all the other candidates--except one--he thought the race issue was dead in Arkansas politics. To his sorrow, and to many other people's, he was proved wrong. As for the GOP candidate's comic book, it contains an element of grim and unintentional humor. "Footsie" Britt, the candidate, is an authentic war hero who won the Congressional Medal of Honor and lost an arm in Italy in World War II. The trouble is, in the comic book he's missing his left arm in some panels and his right arm in others.

There was much I wanted to say about the Thompsons' remarks on Communist stereotypes in the comics, but I'll save that for December. I don't want to go past four pages this month, and I wouldn't have time to do a decent job of writing anyway.

